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III.—THE NEW FUNCTION OF MODERN LANGUAGE TEACHING.¹

As teachers of the modern languages, in our survey of our own Association and of the American university system, we must all feel a certain warmth of exhilaration. The progress that our favorite studies have been making is so splendid. Within that period of forty years which the memory of older men among us can now cover, and, for the younger men, in each of the periods into which those forty years could be divided, there has been, in a steady current of progress, so vast an improvement in our methods of instruction, so vast an increase in the magnitude of our work, in the number of our pupils, in the size and qualification of our professorial force. In the national movement of thought and theory in education, we have shared, indeed, with the physical sciences in popular favour; and even as compared with the physical sciences themselves, the growth of instruction in the modern languages has been, I think, the more rapid and the more impressive. Excluded at first, or hardly recognized, as a factor in liberal education, they have now made good their position, in all grades of instruction, in school and college and university. In generous proportion with the financial means of each academic body, the work has from year to year been more highly specialised. Almost everywhere, we have witnessed the establishment of the natural division between Romance and Teutonic philology, and between linguistics and literature; and almost everywhere we have witnessed, in logical connexion with the same movement, the study of English placed in its worthy position, as connecting link between those great forces of literary culture that have formed

¹Address of the President of the Modern Language Association of America, delivered December 28th, 1900.

our speech and our literature. There is not, I think, in the world a country where the boy or the girl, born into the use of one of the great modern languages, can move onward more easily and more surely into the knowledge and enjoyment of two or three others.

There has been, indeed, in this wide enthusiasm of our day for the spreading and elevation of modern language instruction, an intellectual movement that may fairly be compared with the enthusiasm in the days of the renaissance, which made for the study of Latin and Greek as the main instrument of human culture. There has been the same devotion of mind and heart, the same intense conviction, the same triumphal movement of men's spirits toward the goal of a special culture. Even in the masses of the people, that could not share in the knowledge and the accomplishments that they so keenly admired, there has been the same fervent belief in this form of education, and the same generosity in fostering it. The popular confidence in the results of our modern language training has made itself felt in all regions of our vast country, as part of the practical sense of our people. The man that can speak French or German, or write a letter, or read a book in either, enjoys almost the same popular reverence as Holberg's young hero, among the Danish villagers, for his ready command of the Latin pronouns. In country villages I have found the same ardour for our special studies as in great universities. No man that has shared in this movement can fail to feel a noble joy in such a display of energy and in such an achievement of results. And, in our annual gatherings, as here this evening, in clasping one another's hands and entering into the spirit of one another's work, we must feel a high degree of professional pride in the progress and advancement of those studies to which, as men and as students, we have given our lives.

But of course, along with this sense of joyous progress, there must come a sense of deepening responsibility. Where so much has been given, there is much likewise to be required.

And the pathetic confidence of the American public in the results to be achieved by our modern language instruction must move us deeply to self-examination. If the chief change of the last forty years in our educational system has been the ever growing importance of the modern language teaching, then, while we may fairly claim a large share in whatever progress is to be discovered in the national intelligence and well-being, we must accept in like manner the responsibility for whatever loss or enfeeblement of intellectual life may show itself. We are bound, therefore, in making up, as it were, our account for the close of the century, to balance evil against good. We must observe, in the temper and mental habits and modes of thought and feeling in our educated classes, as well what has been lost as what has been gained by the withdrawal of time and energy from other studies and their concentration upon the modern languages.

In the vast changes of educational method, there have, indeed, been many shiftings and readjustments among rival studies. The physical sciences, for example, have claimed and received a far more generous assignment of time in our students' busy lives. But, in the main, the chief change of all has been the dropping out of Greek as obligatory study and the substitution of English, French, and German. In this gradual process of change, each of us that is of sufficient age has taken his own share. Thus we can each recall the struggle in committee or in faculty-meeting from which, for good or for evil, this momentous change came forth. The years have rolled on. Generations of our students have, under this change of studies, passed forth into the world. The results, in many forms, are before us. We can, therefore, gain much, I think, by asking ourselves if the wide substitution of the modern languages for Greek, as obligatory study, has resulted in all the good and in just the good that we hoped.

From many points of view, the answer can be a proud and joyous yes. First of all, as for the study of Greek itself, the removal of Greek language and literature from the bondage

of the curriculum and the conversion of them into a special study for a special class of able and enthusiastic students has shown itself to be a great intellectual progress. Ceasing to be the bugbear of indifferent or disaffected students, the Greek is become the darling study of those to whom it makes its all-powerful appeal. Under the stimulus of this enthusiasm, the study of Greek in our university life, the study of Greek language, of Greek art and archæology, and of Greek literature, has pushed itself forward into ever nobler achievement. Thus, as we can all feel with a profound national pride, in the very years in which Greek was ceasing to be an obligatory study for the masses of our American student-body, the Greek scholars of America, in all the highest labors of Greek philology, have won for themselves a place among the foremost in the Greek learning of mankind. And, again, by the enlarged study of the modern languages, we have greatly augmented the average intelligence of our student-body. We have made them far more familiar with those literatures, English and foreign, that are shaping the future of our race. We have set them in the historical movement of modern thought. We have rendered them more capable of dealing, as professional men, with the practical problems of their own professions. We have opened for them freer access to that fulness of specialised knowledge in which lies the secret of professional success. Thus, on both sides, as it would seem, the shifting of studies has been a national gain. And those of us, therefore, that took part in bringing about this change have almost all reasons for self-congratulation.

But, in this complex play of shifting influence, there is one consideration that must make us anxious. In all ages of modern culture it has been the special function of Greek study to furnish, in all the modern nations, to all serious students of literature, the models and the ideal of literary form. The student, for example, that could enjoy his Homer not only came to know the symmetrical and harmonious development of the noblest story that ever formed itself in

a human brain, but he gained likewise, in outline and in personal experience, the principle of epic narrative; and, in turn, as he read a speech of Demosthenes, or a dialogue of Plato, or the turn of a story in Herodotus, or the movement of an ode in Pindar, he gained, along with the content of each special masterpiece, the definition and the practical conception of a definite form of literary art. And, as best of all training in literature, the student, when he mastered a play of Sophocles, was gaining, along with the story itself, a practical insight into that development of emotion into action, into that shaping of character into personality, into that sublime linking of human fate with human virtue which make of dramatic poetry the highest achievement of man's intelligence. And from the days of the early humanists on past the mid-epoch of our own century, this influence of Greek literature upon the student-mind, in revelation of literary form, went on deepening. It was this influence that, acting through Coleridge and Shelley, through Tennyson and Arnold, and Swinburne and Browning, gave form and charm to the literature on which our century was nourished. And, until this movement was checked, this Greek influence, as essential part of university culture, acted, more or less deeply, not only upon picked young men as a special class, but upon all the college-bred men of our western world. Wherever this Greek learning made itself felt, there was the communication to the student-mind of the simplest and most beautiful forms of literature. There was the standard of comparison; there was the sense of form. If now this influence were checked, might there not arise for our student-body, as a possible danger, the loss of literary feeling, the loss of the delicate sense of literary form? This is the thought that sobers and somewhat saddens our feeling of triumph in the splendid progress of the modern education.

It is here, then, that the weight of responsibility comes to fall upon us as teachers of the modern languages. In win-

ning, for our modern language-instruction, its place in college and university, we are bound to see that, from this point also, from the point of view of literary form, there shall come no loss to our students' intellectual life. We are bound so to arrange our methods of study, so to choose among the infinite variety of modern writers, so to expound and interpret the text that we are reading, that the acute sense of literary form and the passionate love of literary form shall come as surely from the study of modern models as they used to come from the study of the Greek models themselves. If we have not done this, we have in so far failed of our highest duty; and in our failure we have wrought a damage to our people and our civilisation.

And, in this mood of self-examination, there is much in what we see of the American public, to make us fear lest, in the mind of the educated classes there be in reality a growing indifference to the charm of literary form. In lyrical poetry, for example, if we compare our present stage of production with the youthful poems of Bryant and the work of Poe, there has been, I fear, a distinct loss in the practice and appreciation of noble lyrical form. There was something, for example, to give pain to lovers of great literature in learning the other day, that, in assigning niches in our Temple of Fame, the judges had not recognized the claim of that one American poet upon whom nature had bestowed the sovereign genius of lyrical expression. And the case stands more sadly still with dramatic poetry. If it be true, as I think, that the special glory in literature of the second half of our century has been the quickening of the poetical drama in Scandinavia, France, and Germany, into a novel and splendid form of literature, it is somewhat painful to remember that, in this highest movement of the century, the supreme test of artistic form, our American poets have had such small ambition and such small success. And in the more artistic forms of prose literature, since the days of Motley as historian, of Hawthorne as builder of romance, of Webster as master of oratorical form,

the later century, among students trained in new methods, has shown, I fear, a distinct loss not only in the power of producing exquisite prose but in cultivated capacity for enjoying it. The men that have shown themselves as masters of prose are not, for the most part, the men that are widely read; and the men that are most widely read owe their many millions of readers to something else than their mastery of prose-form. Thus, the novel, as that one form of literature which dominates our century and takes so largely for us Americans the place both of dramatic and of lyrical poetry, of sermon and essay and satire, and even of *Joe Miller* and *Baron Münchhausen* as types of literary art, achieves its most brilliant successes in books, often fascinating in material, in novelty of incident or in analysis of character, that from the point of view of artistic form are faulty in constructive plan and deeply corrupting to literary taste. Thus, if we test the power of the modern education either by the artistic skill of our men of literature in creative art, or by the enthusiasm of appreciation in our many millions of educated readers, there is, I fear, made visible, as compared with earlier times, a weakening in the sense of literary form. Giving so much else, and giving so richly, our modern education does not seem as yet to give either the power to produce models of literature or the cultured taste for enjoying them.

Thus, in this condition of the popular mind, there is the supreme need for us to supply that element of instruction which seems to be lacking. As teachers of modern literature through the medium of modern languages, we should aim more and more at the ideal which the teaching of Greek literature so fully attained. This, above all, is the function that the movement of thought in the American people has now assigned to the teaching of the modern languages.

In this endeavor, there is one truth of educational method that should guide our striving to reach and to educate the faculty of æsthetical enjoyment. The sense of literary form, as apart from the knowledge of facts contained in the modern

text, arises in the minds only of those students that are so far advanced in their studies as to be able to read the language itself at once with ease and with accuracy. With grammar and lexicon at his elbow, the reader may understand the meaning of much that he so laboriously works out. He may attain grammatical accuracy in his knowledge of the language itself. He may, in favorable cases, under a careful teacher, even reach a fluent and correct pronunciation. But to attain to the sense of literary form, to feel the purely æsthetic delight of perfect harmony in the construction and development of the literary model, he must be able to read freely, to read without painful effort, and yet to read with sharp insight into the emotional movement of situation and character. Here then lies for us, as I believe, for our practical guidance, the final goal of our teaching. Our students need, in approaching the masterpieces of literature, not only the grammatical knowledge of the language in question, not only the facts of biography and history that connect themselves with the special work, but above all the power and the habit of fluent and unimpeded reading. And this, to be frank, is just what I find too seldom even among my graduate students. As they read with difficulty and so slowly, there is not for them, in contact with the model of literary form, the keen flash of intellectual insight, the warm throb of emotional response.

So soon as this ease in reading is attained, then the reading itself should, for the purpose of the higher culture, be sought only in such works of modern literature as are in themselves exquisite models of literary form. Each text read or recommended for reading should, for this purpose, be chosen as example of some definite form of literature. And each text thus chosen should be studied not only for its beauty of style in details of composition, but more deeply in its artistic unity of construction, in the definite relation of the separate parts to the complete design.

Thus, in the proper course of reading in literature and for literature, there must be, I think, the almost complete surrender

of the too common practice of reading scraps and fragments. Volumes of such scraps are, I think, to be looked upon as almost the deadliest foe to the sense of literary form. A single poem, of course, if complete in itself, is an artistic unity, fit to be studied. A well-constructed essay, however short, or a brilliant story, however briefly told, if the connexion of part with part be achieved with proper skill, may be in itself a complete lesson in beauty of form. But the work to be read, whether short or long, if worthy to be read at all as example of literature, should be read not in extracts nor in specimen, but in its organic unity of artistic composition.

And, for the same great purpose, the notes, if any, that accompany the printed text and the running commentary that we give in the class-room upon the text that we are interpreting, should be so framed as to be a steady and luminous revelation of literary form. In examining many such volumes of notes, I have been struck, amid the abundance of annotations on points of grammar and lexicography, on history and biography and all kinds of miscellaneous knowledge, by the scantness and inadequacy of literary interpretation. And yet such notes and comments on literary form may be for many minds the first awakening of the sense of beauty in literature. I can remember, for example, from my own youth, with what a wild rapture of delight and discovery I came in Schneidewin's edition of Sophocles upon his lucid setting forth of the organic plan of a Greek tragedy, of the relation between chorus and dialogue and of the ordered movement in the sequence of action. And I love to recall that happy morning, when by the skillful touch of my own Greek master, in dealing with a lovely story from Herodotus, my vision was suddenly uplifted from the mysterious movements of a contract verb in Ionic Greek, to take in that exquisite movement of sentences by which, in revealing scene and actor and action, the great artist had created the model of all narrative art. And so, in dealing with any text that has the value and distinction of a true literary form, it is, I think, the highest

function of the teacher to train and develop the sense of beauty. Let him reveal the generic idea of the book as a work of literature, the proportion and symmetry of the organic parts, and the constructive plan by which artistic unity is attained. It is only in this way, as I believe, that our teaching of the modern literatures can be made effective as a vigorous training in the appreciation of literary form and in the laws of beauty. A series of texts so well chosen as to exhibit the various forms of literature in passing from the simpler to the more complex, and each text so treated as to reveal in that special form the laws of artistic harmony in grouping and composition—there would be, as I hope and believe, the full power of the modern languages displayed in training the soul to the love and appreciation of literature.

From this point of view, for the more complete attainment of this ideal of modern language instruction, there is one advance in our methods that is most warmly to be urged. So long, of course, as we have regard to practical purposes alone, the mother-tongue must claim the highest place in order of usefulness, and next to that, for English-speaking nations must come the German and the French. These are for us, in our day and country, the most important as equipment for life and study and professional success. But so soon as we admit for our more advanced pupils the higher claim of the training in literary form, it is plain that we all have a special need of the great Italian models of literature. For it is in those Italian models that European culture made the transition from the antique to the modern form of literature. It is in watching the growth of those Italian forms, that we first become conscious of the modern ideals of literature, and qualify ourselves as critics to trace the development of the separate forms from the Italian stage on to our own. In this way, the great Italian prose of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries has its immense value for all students of style. And, in poetry, the form created by Dante, by Tasso and Ariosto and by Petrarch

became for all the western races, in their own awakening to literature, the supreme model of beauty. For me, therefore, the worst blemish in our modern practice of education is, under the pressure of other studies, that neglect of the Italian as an element of culture which has, within the last fifty years, as well in England as in America, made itself felt. And, if the study of modern languages is ever to be made to yield its full harvest, we should, I feel sure, unite in restoring the Italian to its rightful place in the development of the sense of form. For it is thus that our students, in their philosophic studies of literature, can best be brought to learn how, by what changes, in what details of construction and what movement of spiritual forces, there came out of the classic form the modern, or Romance form, of literature. Think, for example, for the young man that knows his Virgil what is the splendour of intellectual vision that must spring from knowing Tasso! Consider how, in successive ages, with what inevitable result, for Chaucer's age, for Surrey's, for Shakspeare's, for Milton's, for Shelley's and for Browning's, the study of Italian form has given to our English poetry the final touch of perfection. There is not, as I believe, in all the range of modern language instruction, any other modern literature that can do for the student's sense of beauty just that which the Italian has never failed to do. And upon our age, especially, in which the sense of artistic form has somehow been unduly dulled, the great Italian models, in their supreme lucidity and harmony of plan and proportion, would work with benign magic upon the temper and minds of our students.

In the like spirit, the literature of the other great races should, I think, be presented to our young men, as part of their æsthetic culture, chiefly in those consummate models of the several forms of literature in which each race has found the highest expression of its own artistic nature. In this there cannot be, of course, any full agreement among even ourselves as to what should be taken and what rejected.

For taste itself, in its judgment of literature, is so deeply modified by the sympathies and traditions of race, as to dispose us all too much to see the highest charm of literature in that which our own special studies and race affinities make the most precious to each one of us. But yet, as to some main points, there would be, I think, a general agreement. If, for example, we admit the intellectual loss that falls on those that are cut off from personal contact with the highest prose-art of mankind, the prose of Demosthenes and of Plato, we should all, I think, be prone to urge upon our pupils the careful and elaborate study of the modern French prose, as being the best equivalent that modern art has produced for the matchless beauty of the Greek form. Here, on the modern side, our students would find the closest approach to the clearness and lucidity of the Greek prose manner, to its harmony of phrasing and its exquisite neatness in junctures and transitions.

On the other hand, should we wish to compensate our pupils on the modern side for their ignorance of the pure lyrical form of classical poetry, in order to lift them above the formlessness and triviality of many modern styles, there would, I think, be a general agreement among us in urging upon them as models the masterpieces of German and Scandinavian lyricism. For here, in the consummate work of the great masters, in Goethe for example, or in Oehlenschläger, or in Heine or Meyer, or in Baggesen, we have as models a lyrical form that is as lucid and as sharply defined as the Greek form itself. And, as in the Greek, we have the lyrical conception brought before us in forms of language so intensely clear and pure, as to flash forth, like the Greek, all the concrete force of the metaphoric phrase. As the perfect form of the great French prose would be, for our advanced students, the best training in those forms of literary art that develop the process of reasoning, so the perfect form of the Teutonic lyricism would serve as the best models for them in the process of the imagination. And in general, for the cultivation

of this sense of beauty in literary form, each of the great modern languages should, I think, be studied in those models of literature that have most of the special character of the race itself, that are most in harmony with its intellectual and emotional nature.

And there is, I think, to make this mode of instruction fruitful, in our young men themselves, as we see them in our universities, an intense eagerness for personal expression in literature, and for the personal achievement of literary form. We cannot read our college magazines without seeing how intense and eager is this craving for the personal note in literature. And it will aid us in our effort to develop the sense of beauty if we watch the two directions in which the student-mind is bent on achieving literary form. They are, I think, on the one hand, the personal lyric as the poetical form that is much admired, and on the other the short story as artistic form in prose. In comparison with these two types of literature, it is somewhat strange to see how seldom the other forms are tried, as for example, the narrative poem or the drama, or the essay or the historical sketch. In my own experience I have known, I think, of only three bright young students that made a serious assault on the drama; a somewhat bewildering contrast with that early age of our century, when every young man of university education had a bundle of tragedies secreted in his desk or on his person. It is, I think, by following this bent of our American student-mind that we teachers of the modern literatures can do our best work in guiding to literary form. It is almost always the modern spirit, the spirit of our contemporary art, that has for bright young minds the highest stimulus of contagion. And, if it is often sad to see how deeply the creative force of young imaginations is corrupted by the badness and formlessness of those popular models that they are prone to imitate, there should be among us the greatest eagerness to bring before our advanced students, out of the modern literatures that we are teaching, each in the language that is dearest to

himself, those perfect examples of lyrical form and of the short prose story that might open their eyes to the possibilities of the two forms that they most admire. It is sure, I think, that, if we made a fuller and more constant use of that boundless wealth of beautiful types which is found in the great modern literatures of our time, we should see the minds of our students catch fire more generously, and the creative force of their own imaginations work itself into nobler forms.

And finally, from this contact of the student-mind, under our guidance, with the living forces of modern Europe, there is to come, as the reward of our combined labors, the new movement in our own literature. In this, of course, the literature of England must as always play a great part. But the social and industrial conditions under which English literature takes shape are too much like our own to make such influence in the highest degree fruitful. There are to be noted in the literature produced by Englishmen of our time the same faults and especially the same indifference to literary form as in the literature produced by Americans. Thus, as compared with English models, the models of the best contemporary literature in several of the foreign languages offer us more of interest and of hope. It is the very difference that makes the foreign masterpieces the more potent. Above all, it is the deeper feeling for literary form, it is the more penetrating sense for beauty of construction and for purity of type. We have spoken of the specially French beauty in the modern prose, of the specially Teutonic beauty in the German and Scandinavian lyricism. But it is above all in watching the dramatic movement of our age, which has been its highest intellectual manifestation, that we become aware of the need of closer contact with the great foreign literatures. The splendour of the modern drama, the most effulgent that has shone on Europe since the days of Shakespeare and Molière, in order to reach the students' minds, must be studied not in English so much as in the Scandinavian languages, in German, and in French. And, in like manner,

in spite of our enormous production of novels and romances, it is the great masters of the French and Russian schools that reveal to our age most luminously the laws of literary form in romance and novel.

Here then, in the revelation and indoctrination of literary form, is the great task to be achieved by us as teachers of the modern languages. We are to keep always in sight the supreme importance of the form of literature. And we are to present each model of literature in such a manner to our classes as to exhibit, so far as we can, that charm of pure form by which each special work becomes in its own special way a type and model of beauty.

THOMAS R. PRICE.